



Date and Time: Tuesday, May 16, 2023 11:45:00AM PDT

Job Number: 197215202

Document (1)

1. [Let Canadians choose their own future; Matthew lau](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "doom" and ("climate" or "eco")

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Sources: National Post (f/k/a The Financial Post)(Canada);
Timeline: Jan 01, 2018 to May 15, 2023; All Content Types:
News; Geography by Document: North America;
Geography by Document: Canada

Let Canadians choose their own future; Matthew lau

National Post (f/k/a The Financial Post) (Canada)

July 21, 2021 Wednesday

Ottawa Edition

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Section: FP COMMENT; Pg. FP10

Length: 803 words

Byline: Matthew lau, Financial Post

Body

Ask somebody who has devoted his entire life's work to repairing shoes and you will find that his answers to the deepest philosophical questions about life and society are somehow reducible to some aspect of shoe repair. How could it be otherwise? Repairing shoes is all he knows. Similarly, a dentist who has spent 40 years drilling teeth and filling cavities is likely to affirm that the greatest force of destruction in the world is Coca-Cola. And why not? His life's work has been to repair the damage to teeth caused by people consuming too much sugar.

This sort of cognitive bias is present in all professions - doubtless even journalism - but seems to most afflict people who are completely committed to fighting climate change. Everything about how they understand the world is filtered through the lens of catastrophic man-made climate change. "People don't understand," Catherine McKenna said in an interview earlier this month with David Reevely of The Logic, "that climate change is literally an everything issue. It's a health issue. It's a national-security issue. It's an Indigenous issue. We just saw Lytton burn down," she said, referring to a wildfire whose cause has yet to be determined. "But it's really an infrastructure issue."

McKenna, who was federal minister for environment and climate change from 2015 to 2019 and is currently infrastructure minister, recently announced she would not run in the next election. Following her retirement from government, she said, she would continue fighting climate change in some other professional capacity. Calling the rest of the country to join her in the climate war, she declared that society must have a "singular focus" on fighting climate change, just as it did with the coronavirus pandemic. It is a conclusion she reached, supposedly, by listening to the science.

Unlike dentistry, which actually does require an understanding of science, the activism undertaken by climate-committed politicians requires only grand rhetoric about scientific understanding and energy in denouncing alleged science-deniers. And while spending an hour in the dental chair is unpleasant, at least the pain is momentary and produces future benefits. In contrast, the misery caused by climate-committed politicians is long-lasting, the bill much more expensive, and the costs nowhere near offset by any comparable level of environmental improvement.

Even in the worst-case scenarios, as economist John Cochrane has written, climate change will cut GDP by five to 10 per cent by the year 2100. But supposing that between now and then GDP grows by two per cent a year, that means there would be 378 per cent GDP growth between now and 2100, which suggests climate change is not exactly so apocalyptic as to demand society's "singular focus."

Nevertheless surveying her tenure in government through the lens of impending climate doom, McKenna concludes that she and her Liberal colleagues have done an excellent job, a conclusion she is able to reach mainly by pointing to massive government spending on climate change programs.

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It is curious that McKenna would point to spending as evidence of successful climate policy. She sold the Liberals' carbon tax to the public by affirming that pricing emissions is the most efficient way to fight climate change, yet pricing and spending are decidedly different policies. McKenna also presents the government's regulatory initiatives as evidence of wisdom, lauding the "no more internal combustion engines by 2035" diktat as a "signal to the market" - in reality, it is an attack on the market, not a signal - that will help Canada reach its Paris Agreement commitments. But she fails to present evidence to justify her praise for the initiatives she helped lead.

Speaking of the Canada Infrastructure Bank's mandate to leverage the private sector to build infrastructure to achieve national climate goals, McKenna says of federal spending: "There's just not enough money there. And there's a lot of money the private sector has to invest, like quite literally, they're sitting on it." This belief that the federal budget, by far the most bloated in Canadian history, is insufficient, and that the private sector does nothing useful with its money, helps explain McKenna's enthusiasm for regulatory control to conscript the private sector into her climate war.

McKenna speaks of spending money to build the future Canadians want, but she is doing no such thing. Instead of letting Canadians spend their own money to build the future they want, she is spending their money to build the future she thinks they ought to want, which is really just the future she wants. It is a future in which Canadians are less prosperous and free.

Financial Post Matthew Lau is a Toronto writer !@COPYRIGHT=© 2021 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.

Graphic

Errol Mcgihon, Postmedia News Files; Catherine McKenna arrives on her bicycle at a press conference to announce she will not run in the next election.;

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Document-Type: News

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (89%); PHILOSOPHY (89%); CLIMATOLOGY (88%); ELECTIONS & POLITICS (86%); ECONOMICS (78%); INTERVIEWS (78%); NEGATIVE PERSONAL NEWS (78%); DENTISTRY (77%); MEDICINE & HEALTH (77%); TOOTH DISORDERS (77%); ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES (74%); NATIONAL SECURITY (74%); CAVITIES (72%); WILDFIRES (71%); ENVIRONMENTAL DEPARTMENTS (70%); GOVERNMENT ADVISORS & MINISTERS (70%); CORONAVIRUSES (66%); EPIDEMICS (66%); INFECTIOUS DISEASE (66%); PANDEMICS (50%); VIRUSES (50%); somebody,devoted,entire,repairing,shoes,answers (%)

Industry: SHOE & LEATHER REPAIR (90%); DENTISTRY (77%)

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Geographic: CANADA (93%)

Load-Date: July 21, 2021

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